

THE POPE SPEAKS

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS PAUL VI FOR MISSION SUNDAY

“A new era has dawned for the missions”

To all Our brothers in Christ, this year as in the past, We address Our message for Mission Sunday. We cannot omit it, even though it may say nothing new, for the missionary cause is so vital for the Church and so important for the world that We feel obliged to speak out strongly in its favour on this annual occasion.

Mission Sunday has rightly become an important event in the Church's life. It has a direct bearing on Our apostolic ministry and brings to mind the command of Our Lord Himself, which makes us realize how great and how grave is our duty of preaching the Gospel not only within the Church but also beyond its geographical and structural confines. We cannot let slip the opportunity to remind the whole Church — Our Brothers in the Episcopate, the clergy, religious, and each individual Catholic — of this missionary vocation.

Missionary by nature

In the post-Conciliar period the duty of spreading the faith imposes itself with even greater urgency on all, though in different ways and degrees, for the Council taught, with deep theological insight, that “the pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature” (*Ad Gentes*, 2); she is the sign and instrument of God's plan of salvation for the whole of mankind (*Lumen Gentium*, 9); and those who wish to really live their Christianity should realize its essential dynamism (cf. *Ad Gentes*, 1, 2, 6), its innate urge to spread, its intrinsic duty to communicate the faith to all men (cf. *Ad Gentes*, 28).

This is the Church's mission as such. And it makes Us turn Our mind to those particular institutions which strive to widen the bounds of the Gospel preaching and which are specifically and traditionally known by the blessed name of Catholic Missions (*cf. Ad Gentes, 6*).

We wish to confirm once more the apostolic mandate which belongs to them, and which invests them with the power of the Holy Spirit for the accomplishment of their incomparable task; and We want all who consecrate their lives to the missions, or who pray, work and suffer for them, to know that they have, in a very special way, Our affection and Our gratitude.

Sign of the Times

Why this preference? Because, apart from the duty and necessity of spreading the word of salvation, there are particular circumstances today which seem to Us to be "signs of the times" for a vigorous renewal of missionary activity. The words of Jesus to his disciples come to Our lips: "I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for the harvest" (John 4:35). Today's circumstances favour the communication between men: the earth has been explored and opened up; transport is quick and widespread; the arts, commerce and international relations promote contact between different cultures and tend to unite the world... On what level? On the practical level, yes; on the civil level, yes; but do we not see that this same process of bringing men closer to each other contains within itself deficiencies which can turn into threats of new and graver conflicts; that it does not pay sufficient attention to that affirmation of principles, that outpouring of spiritual energy, that solution of discordant ideologies in a single, fraternal, higher truth, which, even in the temporal order, can come to the world only through Christ? (*cf. Lumen Gentium, 13*).

New Approach is needed

A new era has dawned for the missions. New difficulties and new facilities lie on the path of those who, in the name of Christ, "preach the good news" (Rom. 10:15). The present state of the world offers a

far wider and more inviting field of endeavour, though certainly not an easier one, to the courage and wisdom of the missionaries. We would like, today more than ever, to repeat Christ's pressing invitation: "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men" (Mt. 4:19). Let us not waste time in corrosive criticism, or let slip this historical moment which seems decisive for the future direction of mankind, and which offers to the talents and generosity of the young an opportunity to be bearers of new and exalting charisms of faith and charity.

Evangelization, development

This means that missionary activity must be conceived in broad and modern terms. A new approach is necessary: in the underlying theological principles; in publicity, recruitment, training; in the methods and organization of the actual works. We know that this renewal is already, in fact, taking place, on a large scale, among those who have experience and competence in the matter, under the guidance of Our worthy Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

In this re-thinking of the Church's missionary vocation there is one question that stands out in particular, opposing two different concepts of what the general direction of missionary activity should be — concepts which may be summed up in the two words: evangelization and development. By evangelization is meant strictly religious activity, aimed at the preaching of God's kingdom, of the Gospel as a revelation of the plan of salvation in Christ, through the action of the Holy Spirit — activity that has the ministry of the Church itself as its aim: this is the traditional doctrine and to it the Council has given its authoritative support. By the development is meant the human, civil, temporal promotion of those peoples who, by contact with modern civilization and with the help that it provides, are becoming more conscious of themselves and are stepping out on the road to higher levels of culture and prosperity. The missionary cannot excuse himself from taking an interest in this promotion (cf. *Ad Gentes*, 11).

The confrontation between these two concepts is a serious one and entails two dangers: that we may consider them as mutually exclusive, and that we may fail to establish a correct relationship between them.

Complementary terms

We hope that the confrontation will not be looked upon as a dilemma that precludes a synthesis between evangelization and development, in which the one complements the other. For us believers it would be unthinkable that missionary activity should make of earthly reality its only or principal end and lose sight of its essential end: namely, to bring all men to the light of faith, to give them new life in baptism, to incorporate them into the Mystical Body of Christ that is the Church, to teach them to live like Christians, and to hold out the expectation of an existence beyond this earthly one. And likewise it would be inadmissible for the Church's missionary activity to neglect the needs and aspirations of developing peoples, and, because of its religious orientation, omit the basic duties of human charity. We cannot forget the solemn teaching of the Gospel on the love of our needy and suffering neighbor (Mt. 25:31-46), reiterated by the apostles (cf. 1 John 4:20; James 2: 14-18), and confirmed by the Church's whole missionary tradition. We Ourselves, in Our encyclical "Populorum Progressio", have stressed the duty of resolutely and intelligently fostering the growth of economic, cultural, social and spiritual well-being among peoples, and especially among those of the so-called Third World, where missionary activity finds its main scope (cf. *Ad Gentes*, 12).

There should be no dilemma. It is a question of priority of ends, of intentions, of duties; and there is no doubt that missionary activity is concerned primarily with evangelization and that it must maintain this priority both in the concept that inspires it and in the way in which it is organized and exercised. Missionary activity would be failing in its *raison d'être* if it turned aside from its religious axis: the Kingdom of God before everything else; the Kingdom of God understood in its vertical, theological, religious sense, freeing man from sin and presenting him with the love of God as the supreme commandment and eternal life

as his ultimate destiny. That is to say, the "Kerygma," the word of Christ, the Gospel, faith, grace, prayer, the Cross, Christian living. We must realize that fidelity to this primary programme of missionary activity may stir up great difficulties, difficulties which at times may prevent it from developing and expanding: our mission is "folly and scandal" (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18 sqq.). But that is precisely its strength and its wisdom, today no less than in the beginning. Even today, in fact, what by earthly standards would seem an obstacle to evangelization, namely its spiritual character, can help it by freeing it from the fetters of economics, from suspicion of colonialism, from the inefficiency of naturalism when faced with differing cultures.

The debate between evangelization and development is rather, then, a question of method: which should be attended to first. The answer cannot be the same for all cases, but must depend on particular circumstances, studied in the light of experience with a watchful and patient empiricism which is faithful to the apostolic spirit and to the needs of different situations, always with a view to the efficacy and sanctity of the work (cf. *Ad Gentes*, 6). We may consider three phases. Before, during and after evangelization, which always retains its essential priority, development, with its use of temporal means, may be given pastoral priority. There is first what some refer to as pre-evangelization: that is, making contact with future Christians by living among them, helping them and giving the example of a good Christian life. Then there is service: when the Gospel comes to a place, charity comes with it, bearing witness to the human validity of Christ's message, and taking the form of schools, hospitals, social assistance, social and technical training. In the third phase, there comes the result of this activity, in a higher standard of living.

Blessing to all missionaries

In conclusion We may observe that if the debate between evangelization and development is considered on the doctrinal level, in terms of end and purpose, then the answer is to be found in the words of the Council decree: "The specific purpose of missionary activity is evan-

gelization and the planting of the Church..." (*Ad Gentes*, 6; cf. Enc. *Fidei Donum*, A.A.S., 1957, 236).

But, in the practical level, those who are engaged in missionary work must realize that evangelization is helped by activities with the temporal and human development of the peoples being evangelized. Those activities can become one with evangelization when, raised to the level of charity, they become ends, as it were, themselves, and also when, used rather as means, they precede and complete the work of evangelization. This is especially important for the laity, called as they are to "seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs" (*Lumen Gentium*, 31), for "even when preoccupied with temporal cares, the laity can and must perform eminently valuable work on behalf of bringing the Gospel to the world" (Ib. 35).

Development work, when linked with that of evangelization, itself sheds a Christian light, bringing out the concept of human dignity, of the rights of man, of freedom, responsibility, duty, work, social harmony, and the good use of all values, even temporal ones; it lights up the human scene and reveals its beauty, richness and dignity. It also shows up its imperfections, injustices, and misfortunes... which the new man, the Christian, knows now how to judge and how to remedy. And development then draws profit from it for progress and unity, justice and peace (cf. *Ad Gentes*, 12 etc.)

Need we say more, to recommend the missions to your prayers and generosity? When the missions are rightly understood they need no defence. In the name of Christ Our Lord, We recommend them to your human Christian wisdom and to your charity.

To all of you, missionaries and friends of the missions, We send Our apostolic blessing, wide as the world's horizons.

From the Vatican, June 5, 1970.

Paulus PP. VI